

LASTING IMPACT: YOUNG PEOPLE ARE EMPOWERED TO MAKE POSITIVE CHANGES IN THEIR LIVES AND THRIVE IN THEIR EDUCATION, THEIR TRAINING AND AT WORK

“

Before, I would just go with the flow: 'I'll do it later, man.' 'College is later.' But it made me more motivated. It made me have a right path that I want to be on: what I want to do in the future, what I want to be and everything. It made me a better person in a way: more motivated in school. All the teachers realised that, 'Yes, he's not just that naughty kid that everybody doesn't like. Actually, he's someone bright that has a future ahead of him.' ”

Hassan, speaking in May 2016, three–five years after his course



As young people return home with a stronger sense of self-belief, able to cope better with stressful situations and interact more positively with others, we can conclude that they are empowered with the attitudes, skills and behaviours they need to make positive changes in their lives. We believe that this enables them to flourish and thrive in their education and training, at work and throughout their lives. This theory is supported by the literature, which indicates a link between social and emotional skills developed in childhood and outcomes in a number of different domains of adult life, including mental and physical health, life satisfaction, emotional well-being, educational attainment and workplace earnings¹¹.

In 2016, we began to consider how to assess the lasting effect of our courses. So far, we have commissioned two studies that aim to determine if, and to what extent, participants experience lasting change to their attitudes and skills, and what makes our programmes most effective in the medium to long-term.

One of our approaches is to track young people's skills up to a year or longer after their course, to assess the extent to which lasting changes occur. Another uses interviews with young people between one and five years after their Outward Bound course to explore if, how and why it has influenced them in the long-term.



QUANTITATIVE STUDY

Our evaluation of two of our programmes has provided us with evidence that there is a lasting effect.

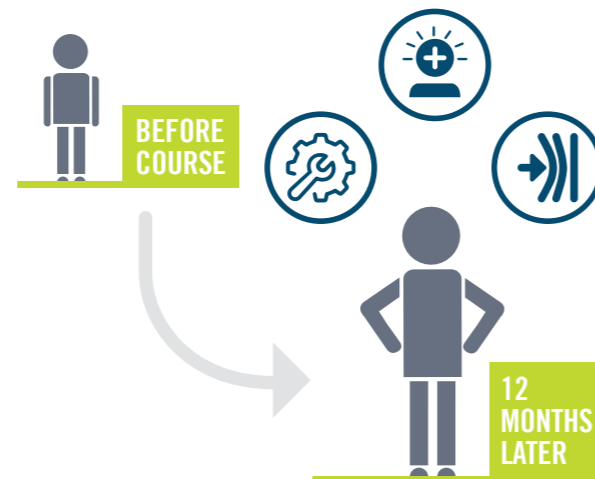
Young people who participated in the Skills for Life Award and the Mark Scott Leadership for Life Award in 2015 completed a questionnaire at the start and end of their course, and twice again six and twelve months afterwards. The questionnaire uses validated scales to measure improvements in the skills that each programme aims to develop.

KEY FINDINGS

Get the Data, a company that specialises in social impact analytics to enable organisations to demonstrate their impact on society, analysed the data using rigorous statistical methods. The study shows that there is strong evidence for sustained improvements in a number of different skills up to twelve months after participation in each programme.

Skills for Life Award participants recorded sustained improvements in resilience, time management, leadership and communication twelve months on, and female participants also recorded sustained improvements in emotional control and confidence twelve months on.

Mark Scott Leadership for Life Award participants recorded sustained improvements in emotional control, time management and intellectual flexibility twelve months on.



HOW THE RESEARCH CAN HELP US IMPROVE

The research has shown that whilst many of the improvements in skills were sustained at the follow-up, not all were and this can give us an indication of where the programmes could be improved.

Furthermore, the study highlighted some differences in outcomes for male and female participants. Females tend to score themselves lower at the start of the course than males on almost all skills measured and appear to make greater gains than them, in some cases exceeding males at the point of follow-up. It is important that we investigate what is driving these differences and consider how our courses can be more tailored to the needs of particular groups.

QUALITATIVE STUDY

Interviews were conducted by nfpSynergy* with 34 school pupils between three and five years after their 5-day course. Interviews were semi-structured, exploring recollections of the course; impact on aspects of school life and learning; and areas in which the experience could have been improved.

KEY FINDINGS

The researchers concluded that Outward Bound clearly stood out strongly as an important and memorable experience in the students' lives that has continued to influence them in a variety of ways.

"Exceeding expectations on the course had a highly tangible impact on the confidence and self-belief of many young people."

Back at school, this led to a number of important changes for the pupils involved, including feeling able to speak out in presentations and oral exams; more confidence in making new friends and meeting new people; being proactive and taking up opportunities as they arose; encouraging others (e.g. family members) to engage in outdoor activities; and developing higher aspirations for the future – for instance ideas for careers.

"For many, it was easy to draw parallels between experiences of overcoming tough physical challenges and their lives when they returned home – and many felt they were using skills learnt on the course."

Key examples included studying, revising for exams as well as other sporting challenges – some of which had been taken on as a result of the Outward Bound experience.

Activities that involved planning, being organised and setting goals were seen to provide important opportunities for the young people to think for themselves, be organised, take responsibility, be independent and be treated like an adult. *"This had a concrete impact on revision (e.g. getting on with it,*

organising notes, doing a timetable), independent working, being more helpful at home (e.g. tidying their bedroom, clearing dishes) and encouraging siblings to work on their own/revise."

Working in teams, especially with people they didn't know, was a key part of the Outward Bound experience for participants. This led to greater confidence in interacting with other people, in particular when making new friends, meeting new people and speaking up/being less shy. It also led to a more positive school environment and contributed to work/school development, as students were able to work with people they don't know, work with people in class/at school and be more positive about work experience/meeting people at work.

HOW THE RESEARCH CAN HELP US IMPROVE

This first piece of qualitative research has highlighted how some dimensions of the experience play a particularly important role in enabling young people to develop. These were:

The residential aspect of their course. Students felt that the experience of staying away from home, and their parents and friends, as well as having to learn to do things themselves, contributed towards their personal development and growth both during the week and afterwards.

Having new, different and memorable experiences. This acted as a catalyst for positive change.

Interaction with teachers and instructors. Instructors motivated them, pushed them to achieve and provided strategies to help them cope with some of the challenges, but also believed in them and cared for them. They also got to know their teachers better during their course and found it easier to talk to them when they got back to school.

These insights can help us make sure we invest in the aspects of the course that have the potential to create deep and lasting outcomes.

*www.nfpsynergy.net/

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION

EVIDENCE FOR IMPROVED EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

“

One pupil stated "This is the first time I have come back into school and thought I can do anything if I work hard and put my mind to it". His recent test results show that he has exceeded expectations in every area of his study. ”

Steve Williamson, Head Teacher, Northern Saints Church of England Primary School (Sunderland).

Feedback provided in April 2015, four–six weeks after the course.

Not only did students feel more confident about their own learning, classroom engagement and relationships, they expressed a far greater sense of efficacy in terms of their future potential to achieve goals and ambitions, with effort, in the future.

THE RESEARCHER CONCLUDED:

A statistical analysis of the predicted Attainment 8 and actual Attainment 8 scores show that the attainment of the research group was significantly different to that of the comparison group. Whilst neither group achieved the overall expected attainment, the research group did much better, with attainment just under the expected.

The study highlights the importance of developing students’ confidence as learners, their belief that they can achieve their goals and the role of effort in improving actual attainment. Many of the outcomes described so far in this report point to students improving their skills in these areas, although we haven’t yet studied the effect on their progress and attainment directly. The following case study, however, provides an account of the evidence one school has gathered on pupil attainment following their participation in a programme jointly delivered by The Outward Bound Trust and SkillForce.

There is increasing interest in whether outdoor learning programmes can improve the progress and attainment of pupils. Self-efficacy, conscientiousness and self-control developed in childhood have been associated with educational attainment. A recent study²³ conducted by Reading University has provided further evidence for how outdoor residential experiences can lead to improved educational attainment.

The study involved a group of students in Year 9 (aged 14) who took part in twice yearly, three–day residential visits over a period of three years, and a control group of students that did not*. It identified how the outdoor residential experience had an important influence on the levels of self-efficacy the students felt they had, and the activities undertaken were seen by the young people to directly translate back into the classroom, in terms of promoting changes in attitudes, confidence and behaviour.

THE OUTWARD BOUND TRUST AND SKILLFORCE*¹

The Outward Bound Trust and SkillForce began working in partnership with Dundee City Council in 2015 to improve the performance of pupils from four schools in Dundee. One of the schools, St. Pauls’ RC Academy, is evaluating the programme by tracking the pupils’ attendance, behaviour and academic progress. This case study presents the findings from this evaluation.

THE PROGRAMME

A rigorous process was used to identify pupils who would benefit the most from the programme, which involved guidance teachers identifying those who were not fulfilling their potential, consideration for attendance and behaviour and MidYIS² scores. 24 pupils were selected to take part and, in December 2015, started to work with SkillForce staff for two periods a week for four weeks, focusing on developing a ‘toolbox’ of skills they would take with them to Outward Bound, including teamwork, responsibility and timekeeping. In January 2016, they attended a 5–day Outward Bound course at Loch Eil in the Scottish Highlands. This involved canoeing and a hiking expedition, and experiences such as cooking a meal outdoors in the dark. The skills they started to develop with SkillForce were developed further by learning about Fixed and Growth Mindsets³, about different forms of trust and about social capital. On their return to school, pupils continued to work with SkillForce for another three weeks, to plan the ‘take the lead tea party’, where they gave a presentation on their experiences and led the audience through some of the teambuilding challenges they had overcome.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Pupils completed a questionnaire at the start and end of the programme. School performance data was also used.




INTERIM FINDINGS

“It was a great experience which made me closer with my friends. I now go out more. Why? Because I know I can now do without my mobile and it’s encouraged me to go and see my friends. It has given me more confidence to speak out more in class and to push myself, not just ‘get by’. I want to do my very best in everything now!”. Pupil, St. Paul’s RC Academy

Academic progress for all pupils from first to second year is measured by looking at their Secondary On Screen Curriculum Assessments⁴ (SOSCA) scores at the end of S2. One of the measures from SOSCA shows whether a pupil has improved or not in Mathematics, Reading and Science.

The average improvement for the whole of S2 is calculated and expressed as a Standardised Residual⁵. The same calculation has been made for the group of pupils who participated in the SkillForce / Outward Bound programme. The figures indicate that the pupils who participated in the programme have made greater progress in their Mathematics, Reading and Science than their peers.

The table below shows the average improvement for the entire S2 compared with the SkillForce / Outward Bound group.

			
ENTIRE S2 COHORT	+0.6	+0.1	-0.2
SKILLFORCE / OUTWARD BOUND COHORT	+0.89	+0.247	+0.0085

*¹ SkillForce is an organisation whose mission is to empower children and young people to make positive choices and feel ‘comfortable in their own skin’, building confidence, resilience and good character using the skills and experience of ex-Services personnel. For more information visit: www.skillforce.org/

*² MidYIS is a baseline assessment for secondary schools for students aged 11–14, designed to measure student aptitude for, and attitude to, learning. www.cem.org/midyis

*³ Fixed and Growth Mindsets describe the underlying beliefs that people have about learning and intelligence, and are terms developed by Dr. Carol Dweck. For more information visit: mindsetonline.com/

*⁴ SOSCA is a computer delivered, curriculum-based monitoring and assessment tool for schools.

*⁵ This is the difference between the observed score and the expected score.

*Note that the study involved an outdoor learning programme that was not delivered by The Outward Bound Trust.